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SUBJECT: GHANA'S OPPOSITION ENERGIZES GRASSROOTS SUPPORTERS THROUGH
PARTY REFORM

Summary

¶1. (SBU) At its August 22 National Conference, Ghana's main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) made important amendments to the party's constitution that broadly expand the voting base for choosing parliamentary and presidential candidates. Upon the recommendation of the incumbent National Executive leaders, delegates removed the power of party executives to select parliamentary candidates, selected a primary system to choose parliamentary candidates in each constituency, vastly expanded the number of party members who will choose the party's presidential candidate, and placed a cap on the number of presidential aspirants. Party leaders told us they had been concerned about the marginalization of grassroots supporters, but said these reforms will rejuvenate the NPP's base. The conference reflected sharp divisions over the amendments, underscoring differences between former NPP presidential candidate Nana Akufo-Addo (who supported the reforms) and Alan Kyerematen and former President John Kufuor (who opposed). The reforms' success strengthens the position of Akuffo-Addo and the party's national executive in the run-up to the election for national executive positions planned for December. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In an attempt to address factors that contributed to the party's defeat in the 2008 elections, the NPP held its National Delegates Conference on August 22 in Accra to vote on wide-ranging amendments to the party constitution that were initiated by the party's National Executive. Emboffs attended the conference's opening session, which featured addresses by party Chairman Peter Mac-Manu, Minority Leader in Parliament Osei-Kyei Mensah-Bonsu, and former President John Kufuor.

NPP Reforms Candidate Selection Process

¶3. (U) NPP delegates voted to restrict presidential aspirants to five, an effort to avoid a replay of the circus atmosphere at the party's 2007 national conference where 17 candidates vied for the party's nomination.

¶4. (U) To reform the selection process for presidential candidates, the delegates first voted to expand the party's Electoral College to include party executives, party institutional representatives, district chief executives, and MPs (totaling about 1,430 people). This Electoral College will select five candidates. Second, the delegates amended the party constitution to allow over 105,000 party members (the above representatives plus party members from all 230 constituencies and polling stations), to vote for the party flag-bearer from among the five candidates. [Note: Under the previous selection system, only about 2,350 party leaders voted for the candidate. End Note].

¶5. (U) The party also voted to select parliamentary candidates through a primary system rather than through appointment by party

executives. [Note: Given the NDC's reforms to its own constitution in 2006, both of Ghana's main parties now have primary systems to select MP candidates. End Note.]

MAC-MANU: NPP MUST ENERGIZE GRASSROOTS

¶16. (U) In his opening address, NPP Chairman Peter Mac-Manu said the NPP must examine why it was defeated in 2008, and take steps to strengthen the party. Mac-Manu urged delegates to approve amendments to expand the voting base for choosing presidential and parliamentary candidates, and energize the NPP's grassroots supporters. Mac-Manu also urged the Akufo-Addo and Kyerematen factions to desist from divisive practices.

MINORITY LEADER SIGNALS PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT FOR REFORM

¶17. (U) Parliamentary Minority Leader Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu stressed the NPP's economic achievements during its two terms, including reduced inflation, improvement in economic growth. He said that the NPP in parliament was challenging the ruling NDC government, stressing that the seven months of NDC rule had exposed the bankruptcy of ideas in President Mills' government.

¶18. (U) Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu criticized NPP division, and said that the party needed to broaden its support base by expanding the number of members who take part in the selection of candidates. He signaled that NPP MPs would support the amendments as a bloc.

ACCRA 00000860 002 OF 002

KUFUOR URGES UNITY

¶19. (U) In his address, former President Kufuor (who had opposed many of the amendments) urged delegates to rally behind leadership to reclaim power in 2012. Kufuor conceded that he disagreed with the party executive on the proposed amendments, but urged the party to tolerate different views and to accept the results of the vote for the sake of party unity.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) By significantly expanding the base of party activists who will choose future presidential candidates, the NPP will likely succeed in energizing grassroots supporters as it looks toward 2012.

While Kyerematen and Kufuor opposed the amendments that will limit the power of the party's elite, both men remain powerful figures within the NPP, and Kyerematen will likely continue his effort to build support for the 2012 nomination. Nevertheless, these results indicate that Akufo-Addo and the incumbent party leadership retain the upper hand at this early stage. Finally, we note that with the NPP's decision to choose parliamentary candidates through a primary system, Ghana's two main parties have now moved away from a system in which candidacies were tightly controlled by a small group of party leaders. This reform could potentially have positive implications in terms of strengthening the ties between MPs and their constituents.

TEITELBAUM